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Library Holdings at the Slavic Research Center

Paul Wexler (Tel-Aviv University, Israel)

In the latter part of 1999 I had the pleasure of spending about two and half months as a visiting scholar at the Slavic Research Center of Hokkaido University. My general goal was to examine the library holdings (both within and outside of the Slavic Research Center), and in particular, the collections of Professors George Y. Shevelov and George Vernadsky. Specifically, I was interested in three topics: (a) Russian historical phonology (including the background of early Slavic settlements in Kievan Rus' and in present-day Russia, (b) Ukrainian dialectology (in connection with a hypothesis of mine that Yiddish, the language of the Ashkenazic Jews of Eastern Europe, was a dialect of proto-Belarusian and proto-Ukrainian, and not, as is generally believed, a dialect of Middle High German) and (c) the origins of the Muslim population in Belarus', Ukraine, Lithuania and Poland (the so-called "ithuanian Tatars"). I made considerable progress in each of these topics while I was in Sapporo. The purpose of this brief note is to characterize my impressions of the Slavic holdings in Sapporo.

While the contemporary holdings and reference materials are very comprehensive, especially in Russian, they do not distinguish the Sapporo Slavica from many other good libraries outside of Japan that have fine Slavic collections. The unique strength of Sapporo as a center of Slavic research naturally can be shown to reside, rather, in the private libraries of the world-famous Ukrainian-American Slavist, George Shevelov, of Columbia University, and the late Russian historian, formerly at Yale University, George Vernadsky, and the library of Epstein of the University of Chicago. At present, Sapporo boasts about one third of Shevelov's Slavic linguistics library as well as the non-Slavic holdings of Vernadsky. Both the Vernadsky and the Epstein collections have important materials in linguistics - my area of specialization. The part of Shevelov's library now at Hokkaido University is extremely rich in Ukrainian dialectology - an area of great importance to me at present. Shevelov also had unique materials published right after the close of World War II which are probably unattainable anywhere else, see e.g. *Inter arma. Zbio池prac ofiarowanych Prof. Kazimierzowi Nitschowi...* (Krakow, 1946). The latter contains rarely cited articles of established Polish scholars as well as of linguists who were to become famous after the war. Another example of a rare curiosity - this time from Vernadsky's collection - is Le'onard Hegewald, *De l'origine de la nation russe* (St. Petersburg, 1850). Hegewald attempted to derive a number of Russian words from Hebrew solely on the grounds of chance phonetic similarity and meaning. The work is a fine example of this sort of "seudo-scholarship." Of considerable interest from the Bernstein collection is the classic work on Russian paganism and pre-Christian culture by E.V. Anichkov, *Jazychestvo i drevnjaja Rus'*(St. Petersburg, 1914). The general library has a classic study by G.M. Barats - *Sobranie trudov po voprosu o evrejskom e'lemente v pamjatnikax drevne-russkoj pis'mennosti,* vols 1-2 (Paris,

1927). Barats argued here and in other works before and after World War I published in Kiev and the West that there is a significant Jewish (Khazar) element in early Ukrainian (Rus' culture. He was generally attacked, and with justification, since most of his examples were more imaginative than factual. However, now that the Soviet Union has collapsed, the Khazar question, once a taboo topic in the Soviet Union, has reemerged. Recent research offers support for Barats'general thesis, though not necessarily for his details. In connection with the Judaized Khazars, I should mention that the North Branch of the University Library has a copy of I. Khajnman, *Evrejskaja diaspora i Rus'*(Jerusalem, 1983). The author is an Israeli emigrant of Russian origin. I had never heard of the book until I discovered it in Sapporo! We apparently don't have the book at Tel-Aviv University.

I could single out a rather large list of other old, inaccessible and unusual materials, but I think the reader is already convinced of the richness of the Hokkaido Slavic holdings. Let me, instead, attempt a generalization. The acquisition of private libraries from North America (and elsewhere) is a wise move on the part of Hokkaido University. Unfortunately, the libraries are too expensive to catalogue in America, especially now with the decline in interest in Slavic studies there. These priceless libraries, together with the strong acquisition of contemporary materials, will make Sapporo a major center for Slavic research in a large number of disciplines in the very near future. In that way, Sapporo will become a sort of "geographic mirror image"(flanking the Russian land mass to the east) of the Slavic collection of Helsinki University Library in Finland. The latter owes its uniqueness, unlike Sapporo, to the fact that when Finland was a part of the Czarist Empire (1809-1917), a copy of every book published in Russia had to be deposited in Finland, including books in non-Slavic languages such as Hebrew and Yiddish. As a result, Finland has a better collection of materials from this period and source than most libraries in Israel itself! Hokkaido University is fast becoming one of the few major Slavic libraries in the world not located in Europe or North America.

I want to conclude by expressing my gratitude to the librarians of the Slavic Research Center for their efficiency and helpfulness during my stay and to express the hope of returning in the near future when the whole of the priceless Shevelov collection in Slavic linguistics has been finally received and catalogued.